

# Aboriginal-Social Justice Alliances: Understanding the Landscape of Relationships through the Coalition for a Public Inquiry into Ipperwash

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Résumé de l'article

Malgré leur popularité croissante, les alliances et les coalitions entre les peuples autochtones et les autres intervenants qui luttent pour la justice sociale et environnementale ont fait l'objet de peu d'études ou d'analyses. Les alliances se créent souvent dans le cadre de différends concernant les terres et les ressources, de luttes contre la discrimination et le racisme et d'autres domaines de la vie où il y a des raisons d'établir une coopération stratégique. Fondée sur une théorie à base empirique et une théorie de la mobilisation des ressources, cette étude porte sur les relations entre la justice sociale et les activistes autochtones qui ont créé la « Coalition pour une enquête publique sur les événements d'Ipperwash », une lutte pour la justice sociale en Ontario (Canada). Les auteurs analysent les textes des participants en relevant leur connaissance de leurs rapports, les points forts et les tensions ainsi que les leçons retenues. Il est évident que les alliances entre les Autochtones et les mouvements sociaux constituent un lieu exceptionnel de rencontre et de transformation, toujours à l'ombre de la colonisation permanente et de la marche des Autochtones vers l'autodétermination. La Coalition ouvre une fenêtre sur les relations complexes qui s'établissent au Canada et à l'échelle internationale.

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***Aboriginal-Social Justice Alliances: Understanding the Landscape of Relationships through the Coalition for a Public Inquiry into Ipperwash***

**Abstract**

*Despite their growing popularity, alliances and coalitions between Indigenous peoples and other actors fighting for social and environmental justice have been little documented or analyzed. Alliances form often in the context of land and resource disputes, struggles against discrimination and racism, and other areas of life where there are grounds for strategic co-operation. Using grounded theory and resource mobilization theory, this study examines relationships between social justice and Indigenous activists who formed the "Coalition for a Public Inquiry into Ipperwash", a social justice struggle in Ontario, Canada. The authors analyze participants' narratives noting their understandings of their relationships, strengths and tensions, and lessons learned. It is apparent that Indigenous and social movement alliances represent an exceptional site of encounter and transformation, always in the shadow of ongoing colonization and the movement to Indigenous self-determination. The Coalition provides a window into complex relationships that are forming across Canada and globally.*

**Résumé**

*Malgré leur popularité croissante, les alliances et les coalitions entre les peuples autochtones et les autres intervenants qui luttent pour la justice sociale et environnementale ont fait l'objet de peu d'études ou d'analyses. Les alliances se créent souvent dans le cadre de différends concernant les terres et les ressources, de luttes contre la discrimination et le racisme et d'autres domaines de la vie où il y a des raisons d'établir une coopération stratégique. Fondée sur une théorie à base empirique et une théorie de la mobilisation des ressources, cette étude porte sur les relations entre la justice sociale et les activistes autochtones qui ont créé la « Coalition pour une enquête publique sur les événements d'Ipperwash », une lutte pour la justice sociale en Ontario (Canada). Les auteurs analysent les textes des participants en relevant leur connaissance de leurs rapports, les points forts et les tensions ainsi que les leçons retenues. Il est évident que les alliances entre les Autochtones et les mouvements sociaux constituent un lieu exceptionnel de rencontre et de transformation, toujours à l'ombre de la colonisation permanente et de la marche des Autochtones vers l'autodétermination. La Coalition ouvre une fenêtre sur les relations complexes qui s'établissent au Canada et à l'échelle internationale.*

## **Introduction**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has offered exploding challenges and possibilities, not only for global capital but also for the social movements that coalesce across national boundaries to create new visions of the future. Indigenous peoples<sup>1</sup> worldwide have come together to share their histories of colonization and to lobby for international mechanisms to protect their territorial, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Over the past several decades, community-based and national Indigenous movements have been actively mobilizing to fight the pervasive forces of colonization, to decolonize their homelands and to reclaim their economic, political, and cultural treasures.

As part of this worldwide movement, Aboriginal peoples in Canada have been determined defenders of their traditional territories and have been outspoken advocates calling for social justice. Their struggles bring them into multiple relationships. Aboriginal-settler relationships have been long studied, particularly those with governments and increasingly, with industries. However, an area of relations little examined in Canada is the growing partnerships, alliances, and coalitions between Aboriginal peoples and social movements.

Throughout the history of contact between Aboriginal peoples and settler society, Aboriginal peoples have found some allies among non-Aboriginal individuals and groups (Tennant 1990, 87; CASNP; Sluman & Goodwill 1982, 228; Haig-Brown & Nock, 2006). In continuity with this history, social movements for economic, social, and environmental justice are increasingly entering into alliances and coalitions with Indigenous peoples to meet mutual goals. At times Aboriginal people enter into relationships to defend their territorial and cultural rights (or more broadly "Aboriginal rights") or to fight against racism and discrimination. Church organizations, social justice and anti-oppression groups, women's groups, the labour movement, human rights organizations, and environmental groups have found moral, ideological, political, and/or economic reasons to join forces with Aboriginal people to achieve certain objectives. There has been little academic discussion or analysis of contemporary Aboriginal-social movement relationships.

Alliances and coalitions may emerge in the heat of struggle, as in particular land and resource conflicts, or they may represent longer term relationships built around mutual interests and concerns. They may also form to address a particular social injustice issue. Most frequently, the backdrop of alliance-building is the assertion of Aboriginal self-determination and sovereignty over lands, resources, and citizenry in opposition to colonization both historically and in contemporary times.

In reality, many non-Aboriginal people in Canada know little about how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships have evolved historically, or even the name and provisions of the treaty that makes it possible for them to occupy the community they call “home.” Within this context, non-Aboriginal social movement actors are challenged to understand their own social positioning not only as social justice advocates but also as heirs to a history of colonization in relation to Aboriginal peoples. As Aboriginal peoples work to decolonize and heal their communities, non-Aboriginal activists seeking to build relationships are similarly called upon to decolonize their thinking, behaviour, and discourses.

The Alliances and Coalitions study, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, seeks to examine why Aboriginal people and social movement actors enter into relationships, what works well in these relationships, the tensions that arise in working together, what they achieve, and what they learn from the experience. The goal is to understand the dynamics of these relationships in the context of Aboriginal processes of decolonization and self-determination.

## **Literature Review**

Alliances and coalitions are probably as old as human history. Both are strategic relationships, and in the literature, these terms are often used interchangeably. In this study we have been most concerned with the scant literature as it relates to alliances and coalitions between Indigenous peoples and social movements.

Both Grossman (2000; 2001; 2002; Gedicks & Grossman 2004) and Larsen (2003) have focused on the role of outside forces in galvanizing local action between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and how these coalitions served to overcome historical mistrust between groups. Grossman’s research has focused on a number of coalitions formed by Native American tribal groups with local non-Native people in order to ensure territorial and natural resource protection against outside interests such as mining. In the cases discussed, treaty rights, which local farmers, ranchers, commercial and sports fishers once opposed, came to be viewed as powerful weapons that could help the local territories. According to Grossman, the relationships built through the coalitions did much to erase the bitter and protracted antagonisms that existed among the parties, as mutual understanding was fostered by the coalition processes. Grossman sees the “sense of common place” as holding great potential for lessening “ethnic conflict”. Larsen (2003) reached similar conclusions in his study of the Cheslatta T’en in northern British Columbia. Cheslatta leaders fostered relationships and formed alliances with non-Aboriginal people to successfully oppose the construction of a large hydroelectric reservoir in their traditional territory. Larsen describes how within interethnic

movements and coalitions, "shared senses of place" and "common experiences of powerlessness" may be channelled into collective action.

Other literature has captured notable features of many high-profile coalitions and alliances. These features are the attraction of international attention and actors from many different sectors, and the challenges of maintaining long-term alliances. Long (1997; 2000), for example, discusses the fight of the Lubicon Cree for their land and spiritual rights in their homelands in northern Alberta. He notes that the "Friends of the Lubicon" that developed in their support, comprised a coalition of organizations and actors with diverse and often conflicting interests, and he points to the fragility of this kind of alliance in sustaining cohesion and action over time. Hamel (1994), in his documentation of an inter-church coalition with Aboriginal peoples called "Project North," also discusses the challenges of sustaining long term alliances. Sponsoring churches, Aboriginal organizations, and regional support groups aimed to call attention to Aboriginal peoples' struggles for justice and land claims settlements, and to challenge and mobilize peoples in southern Canada on the ethical issues of northern development. Hamel explains how this successful coalition was forced to transform over time in response to changes in the political landscape. As Aboriginal leaders became less reliant on churches for guidance and expertise, and came to do much more of their own advocacy under the rubric of constitutional rights, "Project North" restructured itself into the "Aboriginal Rights Coalition" a more decentralized organization committed to consultation, participation and networking.

Recent literature has focused on relationships between environmentalists and Aboriginal peoples. Koenig (2005) discusses some of the issues that arise when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups come together for an environmental cause. Specifically, Koenig examines the fishing conflict on the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula, noting that there is great value when Aboriginal people and environmental groups choose to work together. However, the possibilities of such an alliance are limited when environmental groups romanticize Aboriginal peoples as "ecological Indians," making them symbols for environmental movements. Aboriginal peoples are regarded as separate from the dominant society in their environmental understandings, as long as they are in keeping with the "ecocentric" ethos of environmental groups. When they deviate from these understandings, however, Aboriginal peoples are then treated as part of the problem. Koenig states that many members of Aboriginal communities are wary when approached by environmentalists, intimately aware of the aforementioned tension. Only when environmental groups begin to understand the complex social realities of the connections between conservation, resource management, culture, and economics will alliances with Aboriginal peoples be successful. Bobiwash (2003) also warns against

simplistic and paternalistic understandings of Aboriginal people by environmentalists.

Similarly, Van Wynsberghe (2002) has provided a detailed account of the Walpole Island First Nation and their protection of cultural and economic ties to natural resources. Van Wynsberghe critiques both resource mobilization and new social movement theories, and overcomes their shortcomings by combining them to study material conditions, collective identity, and discourse. One of the successes of Walpole Island and their various undertakings is that they were able to utilize and reconceptualize the “ecological Indian” stereotype in order to mobilize support for their causes, while at the same time educating the non-Aboriginal public about the history and politics of Canada, from an Aboriginal perspective. Like Koenig, Van Wynsberghe states that relationships between the environmental justice sector and Aboriginal communities will work if Aboriginal understandings of human social relations with the non-human world are privileged.

What we learn from the literature is that there is still little groundwork in understanding the relationships between Aboriginal peoples and contemporary social movement organizations in Canada. It is an area of research that is underexplored despite its growing importance.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

The Alliances Project utilizes grounded theory as its primary orientation. Over several decades of development in qualitative research, grounded theory has become a dominant approach and process for undertaking qualitative analysis in the social sciences, particularly for researchers who work within social constructivist and post-modern traditions (Bryman & Teevan 2005; Clarke 2005; Charmaz 2006). Rather than starting with specific theories, grounded theory methodology employs inductive analysis to formulate theory that is rooted in the data (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1998.)

The use of grounded theory in Aboriginal research has a strong rationale. Western academic theories frequently reflect their Eurocentric origins, and contemporary Aboriginal research takes a cautionary approach in imposing Eurocentric theoretical lenses upon the experiences of Aboriginal peoples. A grounded theory approach utilizes thematic analysis to identify key storylines and themes that become the seeds for theory development. By starting with participants’ narratives, grounded theory opens the theoretical terrain to constructions of knowledge that may lie outside of a Eurocentric conceptual world. Therefore, grounded theory is compatible with the emerging theoretical approaches from a worldwide movement of Indigenous scholars who are formulating their research methodologies

within Indigenous knowledge traditions (e.g. Bishop 2006; Meyer 2003; Simpson 2004; Smith 1999; Wilson 2003).

A grounded theory approach is also suitable for this research because, in an underexplored area of study, an open-ended analysis of data provides analytic possibilities that might be curtailed if only established theoretical lenses were turned on the data. However, using a grounded theory approach does not mean that the researcher must ignore existing theories that may have relevance. In the Alliances Project, several theoretical lenses are trained on the data, resulting in multiple readings to reveal the complex layering of Aboriginal–social movement relationships. While the first analysis of the data in the Alliances research is always a grounded theory reading, other theoretical analyses have also been introduced.

Resource mobilization theory provides one rich body of theoretical resources on which to draw in interpreting the dynamics of Aboriginal and social movement relations. Since the 1970s, resource mobilization theory (RMT) has emerged as the predominant theory in scholarship regarding social movements in the United States (Lo 1992, 224). Current scholars are attempting to build upon the resource mobilization approach while reframing its elements “within a broader paradigm that is... more sensitive to historical, cultural and structural differences between groups seeking to mobilize on behalf of collective ends.” (Mueller 1992, 22) The resource mobilization paradigm has evolved over several decades, and in a summary of its development, one of its most prolific scholars, Sidney Tarrow, noted the emphasis on

four key concepts: *political opportunities*, sometimes crystallized as static opportunity structures, sometimes as changing political environments; *mobilizing structures*, both formal movement organizations and the social networks of everyday life; *collective action frames*, both the cultural constants that orient participants and those they themselves construct; and *established repertoires of contention*, particularly how these repertoires evolve in response to changes in capitalism, state building, and other, less monumental processes. (Tarrow 2005, 23)

The analysis section will draw upon these concepts. While other social movement theories such as new social movement and anti-globalization movement theories have also informed the Alliances Project, the analysis presented in this paper will focus on grounded theory and resource mobilization theory.

## **Methodology**

The study reported here is part of a larger research project that includes case studies of Aboriginal and social movement alliances as well as studies with long-time Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders and activists. Case

studies provide a holistic context where dynamic inter-relationships can be examined. The Ontario-based case study reported here involves a social justice coalition, the Coalition for a Public Inquiry into Ipperwash, that arose when a First Nations man (Dudley George) was killed while defending a First Nation's territorial integrity.

Fourteen individuals (seven Aboriginal and seven non-Aboriginal) were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. All but one interview was tape-recorded. The taped interviews, ranging from 60–90 minutes, were transcribed and then analyzed in an NVIVO electronic database. The files of the coalition were also given to this research project. This allowed the research team to review documents and check references as the analysis proceeded. An initial analysis of the data was conducted to determine key themes and discursive threads. These were discussed and confirmed by the research team. Then a second round of analysis was undertaken, noting convergences with social movement theories.

The following case study and analysis have several components. First, a brief descriptive account will be given of the confrontation that led to the formation of the coalition, the coalition's history, structure and historical context, the relationships formed, and the work it undertook. Second, we present an analysis of participants' narratives, indicating how they construe their relationships, key strengths and tensions, and what they report learning from their experiences of relationship. Third, we draw upon resource mobilization theory to analyze relevant patterns that appear in the narratives. Finally, we conclude with some reflections on what can be learned from this case study about building Aboriginal–social movement relationships.

### **Recovering Stoney Point and Ipperwash**

The Chippewa (Anishinabe) of Stoney Point resided on a reserve within their traditional territories on the shores of Lake Huron in what is now southwestern Ontario. In 1942, Canada's Department of National Defence appropriated their land to construct a military base during World War II under the provisions of the *War Measures Act*. The *Act* included provisions for all appropriated lands to be returned after the war. The members of Stoney Point were relocated to the neighbouring First Nations community of Kettle Point. However, the federal government did not act to return the lands, and Camp Ipperwash as it was known, became a permanent military training base for Canadian armed forces.

Years of protest and complaint failed to produce the return of the territory. In 1993, a group of Stoney Pointers decided to take a stand. They established a presence in the territory, setting up temporary shelters where their families used to reside. They referred to their land as Aazhodena, the original name for the territory. They lived uneasily beside the military for



two years. The Stoney Pointers found support from outside individuals and organizations, including other Aboriginal people, a solidarity group in London, Ontario, local churches, and unions. In the summer of 1995, with still no progress on the return of the land, their action escalated. After Labour Day of 1995, unarmed Stoney Pointers occupied the adjacent Ipperwash Provincial Park where there was a burial site on their ancestral land. In the police raid that ensued late on the evening of September 6<sup>th</sup>, police shot and killed one of the Stoney Pointers, Dudley George.

Immediately following the killing of Dudley George, there were allegations that there had been political interference at the highest level, involving then premier, Mike Harris, who had taken office just three months previously with a majority government. It was claimed that the police responded to political direction in taking offensive action, rather than continuing their low-key policing of the territorial dispute at Stoney Point and Ipperwash. Meeting with Premier Harris after the killing, the Assembly of First Nations' National Chief Ovide Mercredi called for a public inquiry (Ipperwash Inquiry Hearings, 2005).

Harris resisted the call for a public inquiry and left the review to a special investigative unit that did not report until July, 1996. They announced that Ontario Provincial Police Sergeant Kenneth Deane would be charged with criminal negligence causing death. In May 1997, Deane was given a two-years-less-a-day conditional sentence and 180 hours of community service. The family and supporters of Dudley George were outraged.

### **The Coalition for a Public Inquiry into Ipperwash<sup>1</sup>**

Following his election in 1995, Premier Mike Harris made many enemies. His "common sense revolution" and severe budget cutbacks alienated the labour movement and non-conservatives. Teachers, health workers, and welfare recipients were targeted by his Conservative government. This confrontational environment created the potential for finding ready allies who were willing to see the provincial government challenged on Aboriginal human rights or Aboriginal justice, one way in which the killing of Dudley George was framed.

At that time, a Toronto-based Aboriginal solidarity group, called the Turtle Island Support Group, was being urged by a number of Aboriginal leaders and Elders to take a leadership role in forming a coalition of groups and individuals who wanted to see justice related to the killing of Dudley George and the land dispute at Ipperwash.<sup>3</sup> The Turtle Island Support Group decided to take on the leadership challenge. On international Human Rights Day, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1997, a public meeting was held to bring together individuals and organizations who wanted to take action on Ipperwash. Over time, this caucus structure evolved into a "*small core group who set strategy, and a very large network of people who could be*

*mobilized for any number of things.*" In the words of one non-Aboriginal core group member, "... it was a coalescence, not a coalition."<sup>4</sup>

In its initial stages, the coalition took a number of important steps. First, they adopted the goal of getting a public inquiry into the killing of Dudley George. This singular vision was to provide a stable rallying point as the years and challenges unfolded. Second, they gained support from reputable organizations that backed this goal; the coalition regularly circulated the names of eighty organizations that had called for a public inquiry. Third, they spent considerable time developing a Statement of Unity that articulated how they would work together, particularly how the coalition would work with the family of Dudley George. Members of the George family were involved in these initial stages and helped shape the Statement of Unity. The Statement of Unity, as appears in Appendix A, clearly stated that the broad underlying issue for Aboriginal people was one of sovereignty, and for non-Aboriginal partners, there was a responsibility to address this clear violation of human and civil rights of Aboriginal people.

The coalition launched a strategy of lobbying government officials at the provincial and federal levels and keeping the need for a public inquiry before the general public. Each year, they held a commemorative vigil at the provincial legislature grounds from 9–11 p.m. on the anniversary of the killing, ending at the time that Dudley had been shot. Early in their work, they sought a briefing on international law and determined that all domestic channels of resolution needed to be exhausted before they could appeal to United Nations organizations. Their long-term strategy became one of bringing their call for justice through all domestic avenues and if not successful, to take the next step into the international arena.

In the seven years that the coalition functioned, members held many public events and meetings, often in an Aboriginal venue. These were well attended by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they bought a full page ad in the Toronto Star newspaper on the anniversary of the killing. They brought the case before Ontario's Ombudsperson. Various members of the legal profession provided expert advice *pro bono*, allowing the coalition to make important statements on why a public inquiry should be held. Public education was a major focus of their work. As one non-Aboriginal core group member explained, "*The short term goal of every strategy we had was how much public awareness could we raise.*"

Prior to the formation of the coalition, one of Dudley George's brothers, Sam George and some of the George siblings had launched a lawsuit naming the Premier and several of his top advisors "of personally directing the OPP to get tough with the Natives in the park." (Edwards 2001, 141) The provincial government maintained that a public inquiry could not be called as long as there was a civil suit before the courts. The case became divisive

within the George family and two siblings withdrew from the suit. The differences of views had implications for the coalition in working with the George family. The coalition kept its distance from the court case, in part because of the continuing belief that they should not take sides. Subsequently, there was tension with one of the siblings who had withdrawn from the suit because of the coalition's continuing relationship with other members of the family.

In 1998, the coalition brought the lack of a public inquiry before the Human Rights Committee (HRC) of the United Nations, which was reviewing Canada's compliance with the U.N. Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. They sent a delegation including well-known Aboriginal leaders to present this grievance in New York City. Shortly afterwards, the HRC added its voice in calling for a public inquiry into Ipperwash.<sup>5</sup> It noted that the federal government had an obligation to comply with its responsibilities under international law. The federal government became a further target for lobbying by the coalition. The federal government maintained that they could not intervene in a matter that was within provincial jurisdiction. The federal refusal to uphold its responsibilities in international law did not deter the coalition from taking another opportunity, in 2002, to bring the case forward, this time to the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which was undertaking its regular review of Canada's compliance with the international convention. This time they sent representatives to Geneva. Again, an international body declared that a public inquiry should be called to ensure that justice was served.

Membership in the coalition changed over time, but a core group of non-Aboriginal members was quite stable. Ann Pohl and Robin Buyers were the most visible non-Aboriginal members of the coalition in the public eye and on the Internet. From the beginning, the coalition sought strong Aboriginal leadership in its decision making and its media relations. Aboriginal individuals took on a variety of roles and responsibilities at different points in time. Aboriginal people, both grassroots and high profile leaders, came forward as spokespeople for media and public events. Others participated in annual strategic planning sessions or facilitated resources such as contacts with Elders and the broader Aboriginal community, meeting space, fundraising assistance, ongoing advice, and mobilization for public events. Members of the George family were often speakers at the vigil and other events.

Parallel to the coalition, there were efforts by others to bring about a public inquiry. Opposition political leaders raised the issue in the legislature and the media. *Toronto Star* newspaper journalist Peter Edwards published a book *One Dead Indian* in 2001, disseminating the story of Ipperwash to a broader national and international audience. Under the leadership of Pierre George, a brother of Dudley George, a support group

formed to focus on the ongoing struggle to get the land returned and to recognize Stoney Point as a separate First Nation. Pierre attended numerous speaking engagements at public events. Wiiche Ke Yig, an Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal solidarity group that had formed in London, Ontario as a chapter of the Canadian Association in Support of Native People, had provided support to the Stoney Pointers in the early days before Dudley George had been killed. The group was a founding member of the coalition and offered ongoing guidance and support. Aboriginal political organizations continued to speak out, although the commitment to this issue varied with different leaders.

Sam George and his legal team maintained their own strategy of reaching out for public support.<sup>6</sup> Sam developed strong working relationships with union organizations and other social justice groups, engaging in speaking engagements. The coalition became a source of contacts and networks for his public speaking strategy. Labour organizations lent their support to those bringing the court case and also responded to specific requests from the coalition. The Ontario Federation of Labour and others contributed funds that allowed the coalition to bring the case forward internationally. In September 2003, Amnesty International launched an international report calling for a public inquiry into the killing of Dudley George at Ipperwash.

Mike Harris had resigned from office in 2002, and a new Conservative leader, Ernie Eves, had become Premier. Under Eve's leadership, the government had continued to resist a call for a public inquiry and had put every obstacle in the way of bringing the litigation forward. In the pending provincial election of September 2003, both the Liberal and New Democratic Party leaders had pledged to call a public inquiry if they won the election. On election day, George family members pursuing the court case announced that they were dropping the civil suit. Even though court was to begin the following Monday, they had always said that they would drop the litigation if a public inquiry was called. However, the incumbent Government of Ontario would only agree to drop the lawsuit if those litigating accepted a financial settlement. This was a painful decision for those bringing the court case because, although it seemed imminent that a public inquiry would likely be called given the election's projected outcome, it was not guaranteed.

The newly-minted Liberal premier, Dalton McGuinty, made the announcement of a public inquiry into the killing of Dudley George within hours of being elected. In November 2003, Justice Sidney Linden was appointed to head the inquiry. Public hearings were subsequently scheduled to begin in Forest, a non-Aboriginal community neighbouring Kettle Point and Stoney Point. The work of the coalition was over.

## **Analysis of Participants' Narratives**

The fourteen individuals interviewed in this study provided important perspectives on the coalition's relationships and work. They were asked about their participation in the coalition, what worked well in their relationships, the areas of tension, and what they had learned from the experience of working together.

As the research unfolded, it became clear that there were two distinct groups who were engaged in this solidarity work. One consisted of individuals and organizations that had rallied to support the Stoney Pointers at the time they returned to Aazhodena in 1993, before Dudley George was killed. The coalition calling for a public inquiry into his killing included some of the same individuals and organizations, but also involved activists and organizations that did not have this earlier relationship. Most of the members of the coalition's core group became involved after the killing. Once we realized that this difference existed, we ensured representation from both groups. Interviewing stopped once it appeared that there was theoretical saturation, that is, that similar themes were recurring in every interview.

Our analysis of the data here represents two distinct readings, following the work of Van Maanen (1988) and Lather (1991), who provide a precedent in discussing how our "story-telling" from research might be framed in multiple ways. In the first round of analysis, we report on the findings that arise from a grounded theory reading which looked for common themes and discursive threads without reference to established theoretical frameworks. Particular attention was paid to listening to the voices of the research participants and trying to understand their experiences and perspectives. In the second round, we drew upon the theoretical perspectives of resource mobilization theory.

### *A Grounded Theory Analysis: Learning to be an Ally*

A strong discursive thread in this research might be described under the broad theme of "learning to be an ally." Becoming an ally does not happen overnight. It is a process of learning that involves negotiating different world views, perceptions, and experiences. Relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples are always constructed in the historical context of colonization and decolonization. This is strongly reflected in this case study. The following specific threads will be discussed: coalition as a site of learning and transformation; coalition as a site of pain; and coalition as a negotiation of Aboriginal/settler power relationships.

***Coalition as a Site of Learning and Transformation***

Non-Aboriginal coalition members talked about their experience in the coalition as a process of learning, not only in terms of acquiring new skills in organizing and political analysis but also in relation to becoming aware of Aboriginal perspectives and spirituality. All non-Aboriginal people interviewed talked about how important this had been in terms of their own spiritual awakening and development.

*I just really learned to be more sensitive... just to listen deeper, and I also learned that activism really changed for me to start being about my faith more. It maybe seems funny that working in a totally non-Christian environment was really the space where [my faith] became so deep for me. (Non-Aboriginal core group member)*

*It's probably not too much to say that I have probably relearned how to pray being with Aboriginal people and it was entirely two or three people I have come to know well who, without telling me this, just showed me that prayer is first and foremost about a relationship of gratitude to the Creator, and I am very grateful for that. (Non-Aboriginal supporter)*

It is perhaps not surprising that the non-Aboriginal individuals whose personal spirituality was impacted by this contact with Aboriginal spirituality came to Aboriginal solidarity work with a strong faith-based sense of social justice. In these interviews, each of the individuals spoke about how the beliefs of their faith inspired them to engage in social justice work. Perhaps for this reason they were open to the essentially spiritual aspects of Aboriginal relationships.

Aboriginal people who become involved with solidarity organizations may take on the role of becoming teachers of the non-Aboriginal participants. They take on this role, knowing that non-Aboriginal people are often ignorant of Aboriginal protocols, cultures, and histories. “[The Elder] told us that we have to help those people because those people want to help us Native people, but they don’t know what to do, so we have to help them.” Having access to the spiritual guidance and expertise of Aboriginal Elders was a strength of the coalition. Elders also provided advice as the coalition encountered various challenges, including mediating differences and conflicts in a culturally appropriate manner. Contacts with Elders, Traditional people, and Aboriginal leaders provided this pool of advice for the coalition.

Aboriginal people spoke less about their own learning in the context of working in the coalition. However, there were several reports that indicate that the coalition was also a site of learning for those Aboriginal people who participated in its work and activities:

*I learned a lot about different strategies and different tactics that were used. So that was very helpful. I learned about lobbying on a*

*local level, and also on an international level. I really learned a lot... from the micro level to the macro level... (Aboriginal core member)*

This theme supports the idea that coalition work is an active site of learning and knowledge production, and that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people learn from one another in this context. At least in this instance, Aboriginal people took on an important role in helping to introduce non-Aboriginal people to the cultural and spiritual practices that are part of the fabric of Aboriginal life.

#### *Coalition as a Site of Pain*

Becoming an ally is a process, not only of learning and transformation, but also of pain. In the everyday practices of action and interaction, one's "whiteness" or "non-Aboriginality" or "Aboriginality" becomes very apparent and this may be very uncomfortable and even painful. One non-Aboriginal core group member spoke powerfully on the meaning of entering into a coalition to work in solidarity with Aboriginal people:

*As a white person it's important to enter into alliances with Native people fully aware that you are the direct representative of a colonial history that has damaged or destroyed whole communities and that the rage of people whose communities have been so damaged and destroyed may very readily become directed at you. And that is part of what it means to do this work. I think for a lot of white people, they want to be seen as allies without recognizing what the price of being an ally is. And the price of being an ally is that you may become a target of rage, and the fact that you are trying to help doesn't enter into it. (Robin Buyers, attributed with permission)*

The greatest area of uncertainty for non-Aboriginal people is how to navigate differences in positions among Aboriginal people. All communities contain many views and perspectives. However, non-Aboriginal people often enter unknown ground in interpreting differences and resolving conflict. A particular example will illustrate this. The coalition produced a product that was designed by an Aboriginal supporter. Profits from the sale of the product were intended to go towards the costs of the legal case. However, it was learned that the person who had designed the product was retaining some of the profits for himself. Non-Aboriginal members were reluctant to challenge the individual, taking into consideration his difficult personal circumstances. Another Aboriginal coalition supporter felt strongly that this use of profits was inappropriate, and felt no reluctance in bringing the issue to a head.

Divisions or differences among Aboriginal people seem to be particularly disorienting for non-Aboriginal people to navigate. Often, they are not sure how to respond. Although "outsiders" may wish not to take

sides, by associating with one side of a dispute, doors may close to the other side. Over the life of the coalition, the relationship between one of the George family members and the coalition became quite strained. This family member formally withdrew from the coalition, although he did participate as an invited speaker from time to time. It was evident in interviews that these differences in perspective represented their most significant challenge. Specific individuals were deeply impacted. This tension was never resolved.

#### ***Coalition as a Negotiation of Aboriginal/Settler Power Relationships***

All coalitions must be highly attentive to power relations within as well as without. This is all the more important when the parties coming together reflect historical power imbalances. The leadership of a coalition, its spokespeople, and its day-to-day direction are all potential sites of conflict and struggle. Key members of the coalition, aware of these dynamics from their own experiences, worked extremely hard at trying to navigate power issues in a respectful way.

One of the key Aboriginal organizers of the coalition explains this challenge:

*I think the difficulty always with the coalition is to maintain a balance between Native input and non-Native input and I think certainly I had a struggle with that and managed to keep Native people involved in that in a very visible position. (Aboriginal coalition supporter)*

Aboriginal individuals were always involved in the coalition, often serving as spokespeople at public events. Many of them had a multitude of other commitments and could devote time to the coalition only intermittently or for bursts of time. One Aboriginal coalition supporter commented: *"I really didn't have a lot of time for the meetings of the coalition, so it was really a core group that really kept that going, and I certainly gave it all the support, and also whenever events were happening, helping with getting people out for those events."*

This understanding was also reflected in the views of a non-Aboriginal core group member:

*It was always understood that it was white people's work. But that we needed Aboriginal people to be part of what we were doing to make sure that we stayed doing it the right way ... and people wouldn't think it was a valid thing unless it was both Native and non-Native people doing it together, and I think it was always understood by [Aboriginal people involved in the coalition].*

At the same time, non-Aboriginal core members of the coalition desired more involvement of Aboriginal people on a regular basis in leadership positions. There was a clear position that part of their role was one of



creating "opportunities for First Nations people to put forward their own analysis of what the problems are and what they want done about them."

Learning to be an ally means being open to being transformed, to risk being hurt at a personal level, and to deepen one's understanding of how each individual takes a place in the ongoing history of Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relationships. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants in this research described their work in the coalition or alliance work as a site of growth, transformation, and pain. Often this development comes from leaving one's zone of safety and comfort. Through their association in undertaking day-to-day activities, cultural understandings and differences that reflect the complex way in which colonization and decolonization come into play in the present are mobilized.

### *Understanding the Coalition through Resource Mobilization Theory*

In this second round of analysis of the data, we draw upon resource mobilization theory to consider the coalition's work in action, particularly in understanding the interaction of the coalition with its environment, and how it managed to have an ongoing impact on bringing about a public inquiry. As resource mobilization theorists have observed, there is no shortage of grievances in human existence but only a small number of them become the focal point for mobilization (McCarthy & Zald 1977). We will see that despite its small core, the effectiveness of the coalition lay in the ability of its core organizers to mobilize the resources it needed to accomplish their campaigning objectives. Whether the resources were money, facilities, spokespeople, speakers, professional expertise, or warm bodies to lobby politicians or attend events, the coalition had numerous overlapping networks that could be counted on to produce what it needed. The mobilization capacity of the coalition will be discussed below.

*The coalition mobilized resources very, very well in that people were not necessarily members of the coalition, but were quite happy to be approached and to support the work of the coalition. So that's why there's a bit of a fuzzy line about who was a member.*  
(Non-Aboriginal core coalition organizer)

The coalition operated on a minimal budget. With few funds, they relied on e-mail to disseminate information and to organize. While they had a couple of regular significant donors, they drew their funds from small donations from many supporters. They were able to count on supportive organizations to pick up some of their costs directly and, for specific initiatives, they fundraised from a responsive, broad support base.

The coalition was organized with the support of Aboriginal leaders, activists and Elders who continued to offer their help and networks throughout the life of the coalition. The credibility of the coalition in the public eye rested, in part, on having Aboriginal spokespeople and a show of

support from Aboriginal peoples. Speakers from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations were readily available for public events. Members of the opposing political parties participated actively in vigils and other public activities sponsored by the coalition, as did representatives from Aboriginal political and social organizations, unions and other social justice organizations. One of the non-Aboriginal core group members explained how easy it had become to organize the annual vigil:

*At that point ... you just call up the usual suspects (laughs) and then you ask them to come and you call up this musician who said that they would come (laughs) and, lo and behold, you have this very nice vigil that the CBC shows up at without being invited.*

One of the most important resources for the coalition was having access to the cultural expertise needed for carrying out solidarity work in an Aboriginal setting. A number of Elders and traditional people played that role. Certainly legal expertise offered *pro bono* was also of great value to the organization because of the highly complex legal environment that surrounded the killing of Dudley George.

Certain core members were experienced organizers who understood the process of political mobilization and had contacts with different social justice networks in addition to Aboriginal networks. Concurrent with activities around the demand for a public inquiry into the killing of Dudley George, there were other First Nations struggles with which some of the organizers were actively involved. These networks became powerful communication channels of mobilization. Some members had participated in international solidarity work and would fit the profile that Tarrow (2005) uses to describe “rooted cosmopolitans,” individuals grounded in a local context but able to move into national and transnational networks as needed to achieve social movement goals.

Mutual trust is an essential component of relationship-building, yet networks always carry a caution. Scholars and activists who study the history of protest by Indigenous peoples understand that police use infiltrators to monitor Indigenous organizing activities and “gather intelligence”. Knowing who to trust in establishing relationships was of concern to a number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals interviewed.

The analysis indicates that the coalition was extremely successful in mobilizing a wide variety of resources. We will examine now two additional aspects of resource mobilization: the collective frames that were employed in its work and the results of mobilization.

## Collective Frames

The work of Snow et al. (1986) has been influential in establishing the importance of how social movements use "frames" to give discursive and conceptual coherence to their work. These frames have implications for the receptivity of different audiences to their message and the support that they are able to mobilize. Researchers (e.g. Doyle, Elliot, & Tindall 1997) have used frame analysis to understand how different social movements position themselves in relation to their audiences and potential supporters. In this case of the coalition, more than one frame had been mobilized. Within the broad frame of "social justice," there are several themes. One is "Aboriginal rights," which references the anti-colonization struggles of Aboriginal peoples, including issues of sovereignty and the integrity of land, as well as resource, human, cultural, and spiritual rights. Another is "human rights," which is a more "international" framing of civil, political, social, cultural, and economic rights. This difference in frames was recognized in the Statement of Unity that was negotiated at the beginning of the coalition's life, indicating that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people involved in the coalition had a different focus and different responsibilities.

While there is an Aboriginal solidarity movement in Canada that understands the anti-colonization work of Aboriginal peoples, the "human rights" frame provided an accessible doorway for non-Aboriginal social justice groups and the broader public to come on board. A wide range of organizations signed on to the call for a public inquiry, including municipal councils, churches, unions, and diverse human rights organizations. The call for a public inquiry did not require individuals and organizations to decide where they stood on other issues related to Aboriginal sovereignty, including land issues and the Aboriginal resistance actions that were concurrently taking place across Canada. The focus on a public inquiry, framed as a human rights issue, provided a stable anchor that contributed to a broad base of public support. That said, the coalition included the land struggle on its letterhead.

Framing engenders certain discursive possibilities and as post-modern and post-colonial scholars such as Foucault (1980) and Said (1979) have carefully demonstrated, discourse is always saturated in power relations. The coalition had very clear messaging. In the words of one of the non-Aboriginal coalition members, "*It is entirely around the injustices of my own government and of my own people's histories and addressing those.*" This use of language was a manifestation of the social justice and human rights frame that guided the actions of non-Aboriginal members of the coalition, and it also makes a clear statement about responsibilities to challenge colonization and discrimination.

## **Mobilization Results**

Having assessed the mobilizing efforts of the coalition, we can now turn to examining the results of this mobilization. The difficulties of attributing causal relationships between the actions or campaigns of a social movement and particular results have been highlighted by Diani (1997) who examined both macro and micro approaches to social movement analysis.

The present study, which combines micro and macro approaches, is no different. It is apparent that multiple political and economic forces were at play and it is hard to untangle the many strands of effort that were being made to bring about a public inquiry. The general consensus was that the coalition had staying power, and its indefatigable presence meant that politicians knew the issue had not vanished. As one non-Aboriginal observer shared: *"It is remarkable that such a small group of people was able to keep this case in the public eye over such a long period of time."* An Aboriginal coalition supporter observed; *"It was just a non-renting force that just kept moving forward and that takes an extreme amount of energy."* A George family member commented that the coalition had served a useful purpose, *"just helping to keep the issue alive"*.

Core organizers considered their work at the United Nations to be a very important contribution to the momentum to get a public inquiry. Several organizers mentioned that United Nations support was a catalyst for other parties to take action: *"Ultimately there were things going on around Ipperwash that had nothing to do with us. That we did not organize ..."*

The public inquiry was called as soon as the provincial government changed. Both the coalition and members of the George family had lobbied at the political level for politician support, and leaders of both of the main contending political parties had committed to calling an inquiry. Fortunately, that commitment was realized.

## **Reflections on Building Aboriginal/Social Movement Relationships**

The Coalition for a Public Inquiry into Ipperwash provides a window into a set of complex relationships that are forming across Canada and beyond its political boundaries. The context of colonization, the struggle for self-determination, racial and cultural discrimination, and continuing global pressures sets the stage for relationship formation in the pursuit of social and environmental justice goals.

In everyday interaction, there is potential for hegemonic power relations to be replicated by those who come together. At the same time, there is also the potential to transform those relations into ones of respect and solidarity. Foucault's analysis of power relations, which reveals the interpenetration

of power relations in the DNA of human interaction, alerts scholars to connect the micro and the macro in understanding how relationships are structured (Foucault 1980). Writings by Melucci (1988) and Conway (2004) point to the importance of micro-processes in creating the possibilities for change. Participants in this study pointed to the dangers of tokenism and appropriation as pitfalls of relationship building.

In the Canadian context, it is apparent that Aboriginal people and social movement relationships represent an exceptional site of learning for non-Aboriginal people to encounter Aboriginal analyses of historical relationships as well as Aboriginal ideological, cultural, and spiritual perspectives. From the Coalition for a Public Inquiry into Ipperwash, we learn that non-Aboriginal people need to open up to the transformative possibilities that present themselves if respect and trust are to evolve. They need to take responsibility for learning about the history of colonization that has marked Aboriginal/settler relations and to know that this horrible history has real consequences for building relationships in the present. They need to become culturally literate, and to let go of paternalism in all its manifestations. And they need to be aware that relationship building is risky for all parties involved. These are lessons to be learned about successful engagement that might point to ways in which such relationships can be negotiated on satisfactory terrain.

Into the foreseeable future, Aboriginal peoples in Canada will be continuing to fight for their rights to their territories, their self-determination, and their dignity within Canadian society. These struggles will lead to conflict and confrontation because Canadian governments and their citizens continue to ignore treaty rights and to deny that colonization continues in many forms to the present day. As Aboriginal peoples assert their rights and continue their own processes of decolonization, they will find allies among non-Aboriginal people at the local, national, and international levels who wish to act in solidarity. As this study has shown, alliances and coalitions need to be entered into with awareness of the past and the present if they are to meet the mutual goals of their participants.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

1. The term "Indigenous" will be used to refer to Indigenous peoples in an international context. In Canada, the most common and inclusive term for referring to Indigenous peoples collectively is "Aboriginal," as this term includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, each of whom is guaranteed "Aboriginal rights" in the Canadian Constitution. The names of specific Nations, particularly names used by the Nations themselves, will also be used wherever possible. "Peoples," in contrast with "people," connotes the diversity of Aboriginal peoples, each with their own laws, territories, language, traditions, and history, and with the right to self-determination in international law. From time to time, "First Nations" will be used to refer to Aboriginal peoples who are governed by

- the federal "Indian Act" and who have territories recognized in federal legislation.
2. The coalition was initially called the "Coalition for a Public Inquiry into the Death of Dudley George."
  3. The Turtle Island Support Group was comprised of non-Aboriginal people who organized during the confrontation between the Mohawks, the Sûreté de Québec, and Canadian military at Kanesatake (Oka), Quebec in 1990. The Mohawks' defence of an ancestral burial ground mobilized Canadians of conscience who were stunned by the crisis and who wanted to show solidarity with Aboriginal struggles.
  4. In this research, it was not always easy to determine who was a member of the coalition. There was a lot of turnover of individuals over time, and their affiliations with larger constituencies were unclear. We have developed particular ways of naming the type of relationships individuals had with the coalition reflective of this flux: the *Core group* is that group of individuals who participated in the day-to-day decision-making, strategic planning, and organizing of the coalition and its activities; *non-Aboriginal Core group members* are a small group of non-Aboriginal individuals who participated actively in the day-to-day decision-making of the coalition and who generally were involved with the coalition through most of its life; *Aboriginal supporters* are Aboriginal participants who supported the work of the coalition on an ongoing basis by speaking at events or in public on behalf of the coalition, mobilizing in the local Aboriginal community, fundraising for the coalition, or providing strategic advice. Aboriginal supporters may or may not *identify* as a *member* of the coalition.
  5. It was learned through this research that the legal team of Sam George and family members bringing the lawsuit also made representation to the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations, and earlier, Sam George made representation to the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva in 1998.
  6. The legal team for the George family members who were bringing the lawsuit were cautious about the potential of a coalition to endure for the length of time needed to answer the question of why Dudley George had been killed (Personal Communication, 2005).
  7. We would like to thank most sincerely the members and supporters of the Coalition for a Public Inquiry into Ipperwash for their willingness to share their experiences of working for a public inquiry. We are most appreciative of those members of the George family who contributed their views by agreeing to be interviewed in this research. Lastly, we thank the two anonymous reviewers of this article whose perspectives and insights contributed to strengthening this work.

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## **Appendix A: Statement of Unity**

<p><b>Coalition for a Public Inquiry into the Death of Dudley George</b> <b>Basis of Unity — Adopted, February 17, 1998</b></p>
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This Coalition has a moral mandate to move forward to press for a full investigation, through a Public Inquiry, into the Death of Dudley George.

For Aboriginal partners in the Coalition, this responsibility is based on the fact that Dudley was an Aboriginal person who was killed on First Nations territory in a land rights dispute – one which had dragged on for more than half a century. Disputes like this have been continuous since the arrival of “The European Newcomers” in this hemisphere. At Stoney Point, like Kahnstake and Gustafsen Lake, Aboriginal Peoples know that land rights flow directly from Aboriginal Title and Inherent Rights. To us, the broad underlying issue is sovereignty.

For non-Aboriginal partners in the Coalition, this responsibility is based on the clear violations on human and civil rights which Aboriginal Peoples have experienced in this land since the time of European contact. Dudley's death is just one recent, but horrible, example. We support self-determination of Aboriginal Peoples. We feel an obligation to work together with the original Peoples of this land to publicly uncover the truth about how our government acted during this Aboriginal land rights protest. We are also alarmed about what is happening to the democratic right to protest in this country of Canada. Unarmed protesters were fired upon by police, several were injured, one was killed, and all levels of government are refusing to hold a Public Inquiry into the circumstances of this attack.

When we talk about Dudley's death we use terms such as race-related murder, hate crime, and genocide. When we discuss the reasons why Dudley was at Ipperwash Park that night, involved in an unarmed occupation protesting for return of Stoney Point territory to Stoney Point People with a few dozen others from the community, we identify such factors as land theft, secrecy, cultural oppression, and racism. When we analyze the punishment and retribution ordered by the courts for Acting Sergeant Kenneth Deane and the others responsible for Dudley's death, we are reminded that Aboriginal people do not find justice through the justice system.

Because this is how our Coalition views the death of Dudley George, we are profoundly committed to a public exposure of the government's actions on that day of September 6, 1995, when Dudley George was shot.

We find it totally unacceptable that Ontario and Canadian governments could have allowed or encouraged this situation to escalate to the point of this para-military assault on the Stoney Point People, in which Dudley died

and others were injured. We demand accountability by the leaders, politicians and police for what happened so that it will not happen again.

Our Coalition believes that the links we are building – involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Peoples, from communities, human rights, and anti-racism organizations, faith groups, labour unions and numerous other groups – are essential and will ultimately be effective. It will take all of working together to uncover the truth. All of the individuals and institutions responsible for Dudley's death seek to prevent a public examination. They are not only hiding what they did on September 6, 1995 and the events directly leading up to that night, but they are also seeking to avoid any public examination of their deeds for decades or centuries before that night.

On the other hand, each of us firmly believes that our destiny, our human and democratic rights and our children's future rest on complete exposure of the events which led to the assault on Stoney Point People on September 6, 1995. Dudley's death by OPP (Ontario Provincial Police) bullets was a crime against humanity, and as humans we are all responsible to do something about it. We are committed to working to create a public process in which the full truth will come out about the events surrounding the death of Dudley George.